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FRANCOPHONE MUSIC

'LIKE A POLAROID SNAPSHOT' is how the new album came to the band and what it says about their new cohesiveness

A brand new matin for Breastfeeders

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The interview with singer Luc Brien and guitarist Sunny Duval of Montreal's most beloved Dada-garage band, Les Breastfeeders, was almost drowned out by the sounds of furiously chirping birds. As picked up by a Minidisc recorder in the courtyard of Quai des Brumes, the semi-basement St. Denis St. funky club the band calls headquarters, the little sparrows presented the twosome with ravenous competition.

Perhaps they were celebrating the quintet's second album – Les matins de grands soirs, released by Blow the Fuse Records this week – or, like Hitchcockian birds, heralding premonitions of a more drastic buzz. In other words, the incongruous sounds were pure Breastfeeders – i.e. anything can happen.

In the case of Les matins, what happens sounds like a ton of bricks tumbling from the skies, each labeled with the winks and smiles of a band that brings 90s pop-rock elements into the new millennium. The new CD's spirit builds on the band's successful debut, Déjeuner sur l'herbe – which took two years to record because they had to cadge free studio time when they could get it. The new album also reveals a band in full possession of its peculiar talents.

"It's like a Polaroid snapshot of where we are now," says Duval, the city's most blistering guitarist. "We went through changes recording the first album, just learning how to do things. This album is super-fresh. It was often a spur-of-the-moment thing we were able to capture.

"A lot of the tunes were composed in the studio so there was more of a sense of urgency. It took us two tries to get the mix of the first album, but this time it took us four days right after recording. It was very motivating to be able to do the whole thing in one blast."

PHIL CARPENTER THE GAZETTE

Les Breastfeeders – Sunny Duval (from left), Joe, Suzie McLeLove, Luc Brien and Johnny Maldoror – are holding the local launch of the new CD Les matins de grands soirs on Aug. 28 at Le National.

Brian laughs slyly when asked if Les Breastfeeders represents their fans' first contact with '60s music: "When we started in 2000, people asked us what style we'd call it. So if we made references to the Small Faces, for example, people thought we invented them! Yet a song like Funny Funiculaire (a spotlight for singer Suzie McLeLove) makes me think of Blondie's first album rather than anything '60s.

Sometimes the album sounds like the Ramones, but then they were influenced by the '60s, too. Some references come from surreal poetry of the 19th century, evoking the bordellos of Paris. The entire counterculture (represented by) Rimbaud and Baudelaire inspires me a lot. The Dadaists of the early 20th century were "beaucoup plus destroyé" than the punks of the '70s."

Meanwhile, Déjeuner is being released in France next month, with the new one to follow in February, after which a spring tour of that country is planned.

"We've talked to a few journalists from France who say the rock scene isn't that well established there," Brien says. "For them the French language is not synonymous with rock, so many of the bands think they have to sing in English. That's bizarre because the first bands I listened to were French. In any case, we're not expecting to take Paris by storm, but rather just build a fan base."

As for America, Brien cautions: "We know we'll never play huge halls in the U.S., so we're very happy doing bars. When the Americans hear us sing in French, it's something different, original. In Boston last May, we were the third band on a bill of four. The first two bands attracted about 15, 20 people and it looked like a bad night. But then the place filled up to see us – and they left when we were finished, much to the chagrin of the last band.

"American intellectuals seem to like francophone rock, but we're not mixed up in that crowd – on est plus rock 'n' roll que ça," Brien says.

"They seem to think we're a province of France, walking around with some Beaujolais and baguettes! They apologize to us for the war in Iraq because they know the French were against it from the start. I play with that a bit, announcing that we represent la résistance française."

"We're treated a bit like ambassadors!" adds Duval.

When it's mentioned that some think rock 'n' roll is finished, supplanted by hip-hop, Duval protests: "Who the hell would say that!?

"Rock 'n' roll is something you can understand right away, it grabs you, and you don't need any training to pick it up."

Les Breastfeeders launch Les matins de grands soirs locally on Monday, Aug. 28, at Le National, 1220 Ste. Catherine St. E., at 9 p.m. Tickets, $11.40, are available at the box office, 514-845-2014, or through Admission, 514-790-1245 or www.admission.com

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Joshua Lebofsky may not be a household name but if you're into Québécois music, chances are you've heard the richly talented keyboardist backing up the likes of Michel Pagliaro and Eric Lapointe. He also rounded up other top sidemen for a totally unique self-produced CD called Play a Little Prayer, nifty world-beat tunes based on sacred and spiritual texts. In a world dominated by warmongers, the album comes as both balm and inspiration. Lebofsky previews his work Aug. 30 at 9 p.m. at Quai des Brumes, 4481 St. Denis St., 514-499-0487.

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SNAKES ON A PLANE

SNAKES Fans even had a hand in shaping script

ALLIANCE ATLANTIS

Will he ever fly again, after encountering Snakes on a Plane?

CONTINUED FROM D1

A Georgetown University law student named Brian Finkelstein started Snakesonablog.com, which became both a one-stop news outlet for fans and a way for New Line to reach them.

The phrase itself entered the slacker lexicon, replacing "s-t happens" as an expression of the way the universe can throw curveballs. Did a tree fall on your car the day after you made the final payment? Snakes on a plane, man.

The studio decided to play ball, if that's what you want to call throwing your marketing plan open to the whims of thousands of bloggers. Tapping into a movement that had already produced bands with names like Snakes on a Jefferson Airplane, the studio hosted a Soul' song-writing contest and was deluged with 300 entries.

More intriguingly, director David R. Ellis and others involved with the project looked to the fan base to dictate the film they were making. In this, they were abetted by their star, who had from the beginning been a profanely vocal proponent of both the title and the cheesy thrills it promised.

Jackson publicly groused about having to make a PG-13 movie when the material clearly warranted an R rating. After looking at an early cut, studio executives agreed and Ellis went back for five days of reshoots that include a graphic mile-high sex scene and fresh helpings of herpetological gore. The filmmakers also looked to the Net for the catchphrase no one had thought to put in the screenplay. If people wanted to hear Jackson bellow "I've had it with these (motherf----) snakes on this (motherf----) plane," their wish was now granted.

With that addition, Snakes went boldly where not even The Blair Witch Project had gone.

The fans were now writing the script. And what's wrong with that?, wonders Ellis. "Given the groundswell on the Internet and the fans' desire to hear Sam in all his glory, we were thrilled we got five extra days to do the things they wanted us to do," the director said by phone from the set of his next film, a thriller called Asylum. Ellis is unapologetic about letting the inmates take over the Snakes asylum; it's an audience picture, he reasons, so why shouldn't the audience have a say?

"We had the unique opportunity to embrace what they wanted to see before we finished it," he said. "We had a chance to listen to the fans and give them exactly what they expected."

A line is being crossed here, and it raises questions. Should audiences have a hand in how a movie is made, even an out-and-out crowd-pleaser? At what point in the process does a director become part of the marketing team? Is this a bad thing or does it just rubber-stamp a practice increasingly part of the cost-conscious film industry? Can studios even hope to control the use of the blogosphere as a marketing tool?

They'll certainly try. "I've gotten calls (from filmmakers) asking how we can do this again," says Snakesonablog.com's Finkelstein. "I'm sure you'll see other movies with silly titles. The very smart thing New Line did, though, was to do nothing. No posters, no trailers. They recognized people were attracted to it on their own. And people, online especially, are very aware of what's organic and what's false, and if it's false they shy away."

"The question now becomes," he adds, "whether we really want to see the movie we were asking for."

Snakes on a Plane will be reviewed in Saturday's Culture section.

Are you ophidiophobic?

Phobia goes beyond simple fear, becoming a morbid aversion that can become crippling. According to the Canadian Psychological Association, "There are four main types of phobias: animal type (e.g., spiders, dogs, rodents); natural environment type (e.g., storms, lightning, water); blood-injection-injury type (e.g., seeing blood, getting a needle, having a medical procedure); and situational type (e.g., enclosed places, flying, driving)."

Here are 10 common phobias:

1. Arachnophobia, fear of spiders.
2. Ophidiophobia (sometimes ophiophobia), fear of snakes.
3. Social phobia, fear of making a bad impression, being evaluated in a negative way.
4. Aerophobia, fear of flying.
5. Agoraphobia, fear of unfamiliar places, being stuck in crowds.
6. Claustrophobia, fear of being confined in small spaces.
7. Acrophobia, fear of heights.
8. Brontophobia, fear of thunderstorms.
9. Necrophobia, fear of death or dead things.
10. Mysophobia: Fear of dirt, germs or contamination.

A couple of other notable phobias, presumably somewhat less common, are bufonophobia, fear of toads; and emetophobia, fear of vomit, in particular a fear of being seen vomiting.

SOURCES: PHOBIALIST.COM, WWW.PHOBIA-FEAR-RELEASE.COM, WWW.BBC.CO.UK. COMPILED BY LIZ FERGUSON OF THE GAZETTE

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EDITOR'S PICKS: Snakes on a Plane – a scary thought for many of us. Then again, for some people the worst would be Spiders on a Plane. Or Stuck in an Elevator. What's your phobia? Go to Editor's Picks and Sound Off on what scares you. And you think Snakes on a Plane is a weird topic for a movie? Hah! Go to: Editor's Picks and check this out: The 10 Most Ridiculous Movie Premises Ever.

Snake movies shed their skin, emerge anew to send shivers up some more spines

What is it about snakes that creeps out so many people?

"Our arboreal ancestors were prey to spiders and snakes, and, thus, it was adaptive to be particularly wary of these creatures," said Joseph LeDoux, a professor of neural science and psychology at New York University in Manhattan.

LeDoux says our reactions are "hard-wired," although "culture can certainly contribute as well." In modern life, he said in an email, "this pops up as a phobia in some people." Many a filmmaker has pondered that innate fear. Consider these flicks:

Live and Let Die (1973)

Snakes loom large in Live and Let Die, most memorably when James Bond (Roger Moore), in his bathroom, spots a venomous little fellow slithering toward him. Without blinking, he kills the reptile with an impromptu flame-thrower fashioned from an aerosol of posh aftershave and a lit cigar. Of course, had he had a bottle of Blue Stratos to hand, the cigar would have been quite unnecessary.

Anaconda (1997)

The star of this very funny B-movie is a 30-foot CGI-and-animatronic serpent that terrorizes a film crew in South America. At one point, as if lacking conviction in its constriction, it actually headbutts one of the unfortunate naturalists before squishing him, suggesting a Glasgow upbringing rare among Amazonian predators.

The Jungle Book (1967)

Sterling Holloway was an inspired choice for the voice of the duplicitous Kaa, bringing a fluty, slithery sibilance to such lines as "Trussst in meeeeee! Jussst in meeeeee!" A grocer's son from the Deep South, the actor was most famous

FROM GAZETTE FILES

Anaconda's animatronic serpent resorts to head-butting.

for his lovely voicing of Winnie the Pooh.

Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)

"Snakes!" groans Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford), suddenly surrounded by them. "Why did it have to be snakes?" Achilles had his heel, Indy his ophidiophobia, and Raiders plays on it handsomely. Look hard enough, though, and you can see a pane of glass separating Indy from one inquisitive cobra.

Snakes (1974)

A lonely, backwoods eccentric uses deadly, venomous serpents to take revenge on the small-town folks who've wronged him. Snakey Bender (Les Tremayne) relishes the simple pleasures of listening to marching music with his friend. Burt and watching as local schoolteacher Miss Williams fondles Lucifer, his prized snake. When the local pastor convinces the children of the town to stop bringing small animals out to Snakey's place to feed to his collection of reptiles, and the town grocer beats Lucifer to death, the recluse is pushed into a murderous frenzy.

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